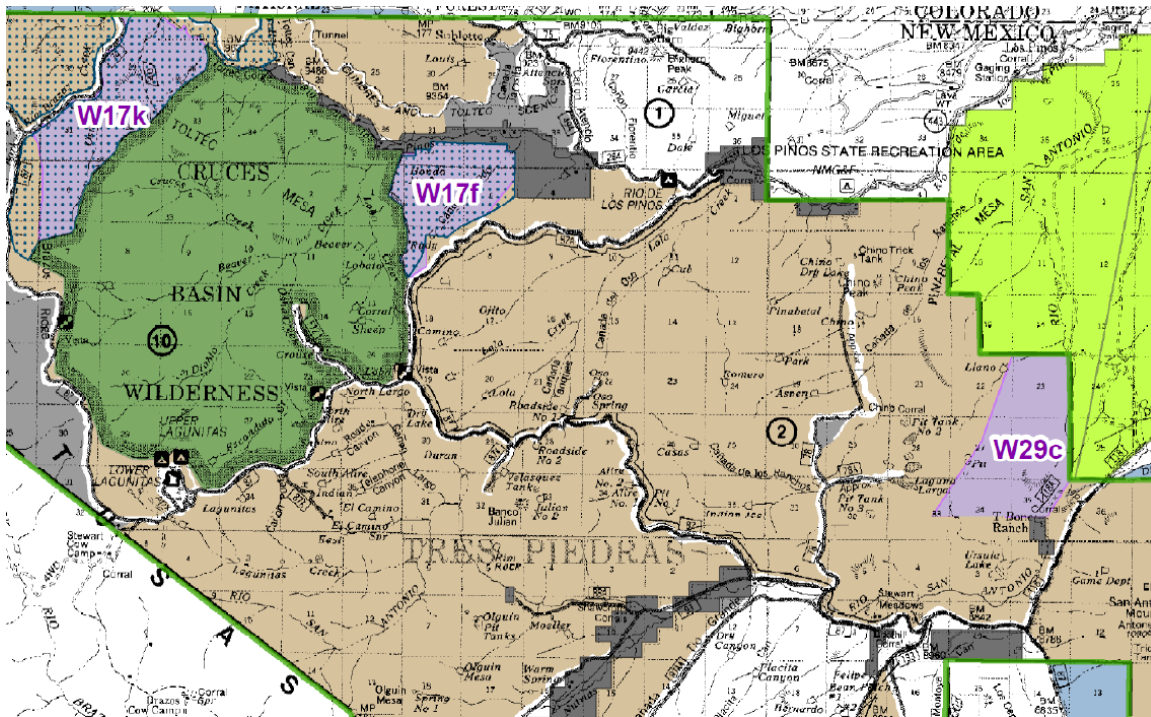


## Tres Piedras Ranger District

### Cruces Basin and San Antonio Watershed

**Suggested Evaluation Determination:** Most of this area does not have wilderness character; however, one portion (labeled W17f, W17k, and W29c see below) does have wilderness character.



If a wilderness characteristic is not addressed in the following rationale, that characteristic is not determined to be found in the evaluated area, except for size. If size is not addressed, the area is determined to be 5,000 acres or more per the [wilderness criteria](#). The five wilderness characteristics are: (1) apparent naturalness; (2) opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation; (3) size; (4) ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values; and (5) manageability of wilderness characteristics.

#### Apparent Naturalness

Most of the Cruces Basin and San Antonio Watershed evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because of impacts from past thinning projects and closed roads that detract from the natural landscape. Various types of infrastructure scattered throughout the area detract from the apparent naturalness as well, including exclosures, fish barriers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, fish barriers, and corrals. Lagunitas Lakes, San Miguel, and Rio de los Pinos Campgrounds are constructed recreation sites consisting of hardened campsites, fishing piers, parking areas, and day use areas. San Antonio Mountain is a designated electronic site that supports multiple communications towers and antennas that serve across northern New Mexico. These structures are visually apparent from within this evaluated area. Irrigation ditches are present within this area serving private land inholdings.

The area around the headwaters of the upper Rio San Antonio is suggested to have apparent naturalness, because of its beautiful meadows, wetlands, clear streams, scenic, and diverse landscape. Due to the steepness and remoteness of the area, there are few improvements, historic logging roads, or previous thinning projects that are visually evident. However according to New Mexico Environment Department, the waters of the Rio San Antonio are listed as impaired.

With all of the improvements, visual impacts, and resource degradation found throughout the Cruces Basin and San Antonio Watershed evaluated area, it does not offer apparent naturalness within the landscape.

The combined W17f and W17k area has apparent naturalness, since it is an inventoried roadless area<sup>1</sup> adjacent to the existing Cruces Basin Wilderness, with little improvements or impacts to the landscape. This area includes open meadows broken by bold outcrops of speckled granite, clear streams, and long vistas.

W29c possesses apparent naturalness, since it is adjacent to the existing San Antonio Wilderness Study area administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Due to its steepness and remoteness, there are few improvements and minimal evidence of human activity within the area.

### Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Most of the Cruces Basin and San Antonio Watershed evaluated area offers limited opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation, because this area is used by the communities of Antonio, Taos, and Tres Piedras. It is also a destination point for people visiting the Carson National Forest from outside the neighboring communities, which contributes to the high use numbers of the area. This is especially true around the developed recreation areas of Lagunitas Lakes, Rio de los Pinos, San Miguel Campgrounds, San Antonio Mountain, and Cruces Basin Wilderness. Some of this high use consists of fuelwood gathering, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping (including car camping), hunting, fishing, and autumn aspen viewing. The access roads to the lakes, campgrounds, San Antonio Mountain, and Cruces Basin Wilderness are persistently used during the summer by visitors using ATVs and motor vehicles, as well as in the winter by snowmobiles. In addition, the sound impact from snowmobiling in the winter and the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Train in the summer can be pervasive throughout most of this area. All of these factors serve to impact a sense of solitude.

The W17f and W17K area offers both solitude and unconfined recreation, because it is adjacent to the existing Cruces Basin Wilderness, with no established trails, roads, and minimal improvements.

The steepness and remoteness of W29c provides solitude and opportunities for unconfined recreation. Since the area is mostly located within the Rio San Antonio gorge, there are also few improvements, roads, or trails.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the [2001 Roadless Rule](#) included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.

### Size

W17f and W17k are both less than 5,000 acres, but are adjacent to a designated wilderness area. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the Cruces Basin Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole, which would then meet the size requirement.

W29c will need to be managed as an extension of the existing BLM San Antonio Wilderness Study Area, because this area is less than 5,000 acres on its own.

### Outstanding Values

This area contains the San Antonio Creek gorge, San Antonio Mountain, streams with Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations, speckled granite outcrops, and the existing Cruces Basin Wilderness. San Antonio Mountain is the largest free standing mountain in the Lower 48.

### Manageability

It would be difficult to manage most of the Cruces Basin and San Antonio Watershed to preserve wilderness character, because of current multi-year and multi-agency approved restoration projects (Rio Tusas and Rio San Antonio) that include thinning, prescribed burning, and the installation of instream structures. These activities are being planned and funded with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Environment Department, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations as a landscape scale restoration project. This area would also be difficult to manage for the preservation of wilderness character, because of required motorized access and use of mechanized equipment for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements, such as exclosures, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, fish barriers, and corrals. Additionally, this evaluated area already has an established use of ATVs for hunting access. This long, established use would instigate a high potential for vehicle encroachment. Snowmobiling during the winter is common place in the southern part of this area, which was formally designated as a snowmobiling area in the 1986 Carson Forest Plan. As with motor vehicles, this historic use would encourage snowmobile encroachment, especially since there are currently scarce opportunities for this activity.

Other considerations that may affect the manageability of wilderness character include long established traditional and cultural uses that consist of fishing and fuelwood gathering from the communities of Petaca, Antonio, Taos, and Tres Piedras.

W29c is extremely remote with limited access, making it a problematic area to manage for wilderness characteristics.